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AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE NORTH CAROLINA INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION;

AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING,

JUNE 19th, 1832.

BY ALFRED MOORE, ESQ.

NEWBERN:

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ADDRESS.



Mr. President,

And Gentlemen of the Institute:

IT was said by the celebrated COLBERT, the wise and virtuous minister of Louis the XIV. of France, that “there never was an association of intelligent men, (who had not factious designs,) without some good resulting from it.”

The purposes of this association, are of the highest interest to the State, and its complete success must be the anxious wish of every patriot. Yet should disappointment blight every effort, another fact will be added in support of COLBERT’s aphorism. Good will have been done in making the friends of Education known to each other,—in the interchange of thought and opinion, and in the opportunities which will have been afforded of forming a just estimate of the talent, acquirement, and capability of usefulness, of the literary portion of our population. It is to the want of this knowledge, Gentlemen, that I am indebted for having been selected by you, for the place I now fill;—I must believe a more extensive acquaintance with individuals, would have caused a better choice. In thus expressing myself, I beg to be understood as not attempting that old, worn-out assumption of modesty, which has long ceased to deceive any body—I am sincere; for my pursuits in life have had little connexion with those objects, the promotion of which gave birth to, and are the purpose of this society. It is true, that while serving in the State Legislature, the establishment of schools, and propositions for a plan of general instruction, have, in a few instances, been brought under my notice, but the manner of their reception,—the summary, hasty, and

indeed petulant mode of disposing of them, precluded those investigations and interchanges of opinion, which lead to information; and when connected with the known state of public feeling, dismissed the subject, (at least from my mind,) as desperate.

We well know how much time, reflection, and close and minute investigation are requisite, to enable even a highly gifted person, to present to the intelligent and well-informed, even on points of less interest and intricacy than Education, and the literary state of a country, any new and valuable thoughts, although the means of complete information be at command. How very little, then, should be looked for, from one whose course of thinking on such subjects was so early damped;—who was without the aid of books, and unsustained by health. I trust I shall be excused for my frankness in saying, that I have obeyed your commands with the greatest reluctance; and nothing but the return of the members of this society to their respective homes, before I heard of the selection they had made,—the impracticability of a new appointment, and the fear of a bad effect resulting to an institution at its outset, whose object is so patriotic, could possibly have prevailed on me to place myself before the public eye, under circumstances so unfavourable. I felt called upon for a sacrifice of my own feelings, and I have made it, in the hope of some good resulting from it, in saving the Institute from embarrassment.

There is, however, one point in connexion with the object of this Institution, on which I am not uninformed. It is the state of the public mind in North-Carolina, relative to Education: and unfeigned is my regret, that instead of being able to congratulate you on the certainty of a hearty co-operation of our fellow citizens, in any well digested plan for the general diffusion of that great blessing over the State, truth obliges me to warn you of a sullen and steady opposition to every scheme you may devise, and every effort you may make. Are proofs exacted of me?—I refer you to the history of the University of North-Carolina up to the year 1830;—I refer you to the occurrences of that year, when the Legislature refused to *lend* a little money, to the only literary institution of the State, to save it from absolute destruction.

How little it was cared for,—with what utter indifference it was viewed when tottering to a fall, may be gathered from this:—the members of that session, at least the majority, never even cast a thought upon it!!—how else can we account for their neglect of an institution which is guaranteed by the Constitution to the people, and which the qualification oath of every member bound him to support? I have used the words “refused to lend,” because, although the resolution passed, *such conditions were annexed*, that the trustees, as honest and faithful guardians, were obliged to refuse acceding to*. But the test of public feeling does not end with the Legislature;—our Banks were applied to in succession, and each refused to advance a dollar!!—That we have yet a University, is gratefully to be attributed to the Branch of the United States’ Bank at Fayetteville, which promptly advanced all that was asked, with no other security than the seal of the corporation.

It is natural when we have much at stake, that our feelings should be under strong excitement; and when thus circumstanced, it is equally natural, we should put the most favourable construction upon things, and even at times force our belief on the favoured side. This is nature, but it is not wisdom. We should never endeavour to extract encouragement from that which contains it not. Allow me then, in the same plainness of speech, which I have used from the commencement, to turn your attention from the Legislature, and monied institutions, to the state of feeling and opinion among the people.

Let the form of government be what it may, men as naturally divide into classes of association, as birds do into flocks, and for the same reason,—their manners, habits and tastes, are different. Here is the obstacle to the acquisition of real information as to the feelings and opinions of the mass of the people,—the great majority, relative to Education; and hence the mistake of many, in their flattering anticipations of a direct appeal to them. That portion of the community which has received a good Education, and that portion which is uneducated, but from wealth, marriage, and the like, is associated with the first, are to a man, the open, decided friends of literature; because there is not one among them,

*their acquiescence

who has not either felt the advantages of learning, or suffered mortification from the want of it. These causes, though diametrically opposite, are productive of the same effect: they tend in the same striking manner, to evince its inestimable worth, and draw from every patriotic heart, the warmest wishes for its general dissemination. But it is not from these we are to learn public opinion: they take no steps to possess themselves of it. It is true, when it is wished to be a member of Assembly or of Congress, there is abundant intercourse with the people, but then, it is all directed to the *election*. Among the friends of Education, few have troubled themselves to go among the people, to know their opinions on that subject, and exert themselves to impress upon them, the great, but unhappily hidden truth, that their interest *there*, is greater than almost any where else.

In accounting for such knowledge as I possess, of the opinions of the people of North-Carolina, relative to Education, I beg to disclaim any pretension to industry or patriotism, beyond what is ordinarily met with in life. I was long a member of the State Legislature, during which time, I had occasion to mix much with the people. At first, I know I felt it a duty; but afterwards, it may, perhaps, have become a habit with me, to ask their opinions upon all subjects of general interest. These inquiries have not been confined to my immediate constituents, but extended themselves wherever I went, and have continued for more than twenty years. The uniformity of opinion among them is remarkable, and of the most discouraging character. It is true I found few who condemned Education as an evil; yet there were some. The great majority readily admitted that it was highly desirable; but their idea of what is meant by Education, is truly primitive. To be able to read, to write and to cipher, is with them, a finished education. Nay, I have, upon more than one occasion, heard a man called a *scholar*, who read with difficulty; who wrote in a manner, barely sufficient to free him from the suspicion of being skilled in hieroglyphics; and whose whole arithmetical knowledge only allowed of his putting a few simple numbers together, with a chance of being occasionally right. To Colleges, they have a decided hostility, and are fixed in the belief, that they are solely designed

for the education of the sons of rich men, that they may be enabled to deceive and oppress every body else. That in one sense of the word, there are many of our citizens, who hold and express very different opinions, is certain: but number these against the rest, in a population of more than 700,000 souls, and they dwindle to a feeble minority.

That the people mean well, I never doubted;—they judge according to their means of judging, and are not to be blamed, for failing to see those things, which lie without the sphere of their vision. Those who have penetrated the temple of science, far enough to observe the beauty and grandeur of its structure; who have had light to beam upon them from sources that are unknown to the great majority of their fellow beings, and whose generous feelings, knowing no selfishness, would extend the blessings they enjoy to all;—they too, should have the kindest look of indulgence cast upon them, for any little impatience they may exhibit, at the apathy with which their counsels may be received, and the difficulties that may be thrown in their way, when struggling for the good of others.

The obstacles which surround us, and are to be contended with, I have placed before you gentlemen, in the simplicity and nakedness of truth. It may be supposed, that I have viewed this subject through a darker medium than I should have done;—I would be glad to think so too;—but the opinions I have delivered are drawn from facts; and have settled on my mind, through inquiries which have spread far and continued long.

To find a remedy for the deplorable situation we are in, is the object, and grand desideratum of this association; and the task is as arduous, as the purpose is pious, generous, and noble. Energy, activity, unceasing perseverance, and indomitable patience must be your motto; for, from the nature of things, this must be a work of time.

It would be a great gratification to me, could I furnish the Institute with a plan of Education, and believe after I had done so, that it would be of any use; but I must be excused even the attempt, for as I frankly stated in the commencement of this address, my pursuits in life have led to little information on such subjects, and moreover, I am under the impression that such a plan would be premature. But let us

not shrink from our purpose ;—hope is the privilege even of the ship-wrecked mariner, when sustained by a single plank. In addition to the support which so good a cause will receive, from the known talent, firmness, and experience of many of the members of this association, something may be gained by fortuitous circumstances. It may be but a phantom of the brain, but I am sometimes inclined to the opinion, that there is a strong analogy between States or Nations, and individuals. Incidents of a very similar character, and a probationary state to be gone through, are common to both. It is very certain, that events no way under the control of human wisdom, have a cogent effect on each, and the most important changes are at times occasioned, by apparently very inadequate means ; while at others, combinations which would appear certain of producing particular results, have either failed altogether, or caused the reverse of what had been designed by them. To *expect* any sudden change of public opinion, would be an absurdity unquestionably, yet we may be allowed to hope for it, particularly in a case, where our prospects are sufficiently gloomy, to justify us in seeking to drive away despondency, even by invoking a miracle.

Let us now turn our attention from the consideration of family affairs, if I may be indulged in thus expressing myself, to the literary state of the nation, past, and present.

It has often been both said and written by our countrymen, that the United States stand absolutely unprecedented in the history of the world. This, no doubt, is true in some particulars, and in these, we have abundant cause for gratitude and self-gratulation. But with all my pride of country, and national prejudice, I cannot so far go into Judaism, as to believe we are a people specially chosen, and set apart by the Omnipotent, for faculties and endowments of the mind, beyond a parallel with the gracious benefactions he has heretofore been pleased to bestow upon man. Such opinions are mere rhapsodies, and are founded upon a miscalculation of our years, and consequent erroneous estimate of our acquisitions. These enthusiasts look to the planting of the first English Colony on the shores of North America ; they take this period for their datum, and refuse to look further back. But is this a fair way of reasoning ; a just way of thinking ? Our forefathers were not savages—were not the *aborigines* of this country—they were the conquerors, and landed a civilized

people. They brought the Bible and the arts with them—and although emigrants are not the most prominent of any country, in wealth, talent, or literature, nevertheless, they are part of that country which has been left behind, and bring with them the habits, manners, feelings, and opinions of their countrymen. Such were our ancestors, when they landed on these shores:—they were hardy and adventurous, as is ever the case; but they were also a civilized, and an intellectual people. These things should be remembered, while it should also not be forgotten, that if we would search for our origin as a people, we must go back as a part of the British nation, beyond the days of Canute and of Alfred. There is one general operative law which has been ordained by Providence, for the government of the affairs of this world, and of all that is in it. The progress of a nation from barbarism to civilization of man, from infancy to maturity,—of a plant, from the unfolding of the germ to the production of its fruit, is alike graduated by one great scale, and holds connexion and resemblance throughout. Whatever self-love may teach, or vanity inspire, this law will never be overthrown, for it is the common law of nature and of things. As soon may you expect to see the new-born infant acquire in a day, the size, strength and powers of a man, as a nation suddenly rising into eminence in literature and the arts. Time *will* demand its due,—a certain probationary state *must* be gone through; and however comparatively rapid, the process at best is but slow.

The positive checks to our advancement as a literary people, seem also to be overlooked. We should recur to these, for while they restrain our vanities and premature assumptions, they will give us strength and confidence in ourselves, which will wear well because they have been well founded.

It is true we came a civilized people here, but it was civilization not of the highest refinement—an intellectual people, but still subordinate—a people not destitute of literature, but yet literature in its infancy:—in a word, our fathers were to America, what Cadmus was to Greece. The very fact of emigration and settlement in a wilderness, formed an immediate and powerful check. Civilized intercourse was confined to the few christian beings who were assembled on the shore, while the means of subsistence, and protection from

the tomahawk and scalping knife, engaged every thought, and bounded every effort. It is the nature of man to assimilate with that which is about, and surrounds him. The wilderness, the savages, the primitive way of living—all these had their effect; the grade of civilization was lowered, and letters, though still preserved, retrograded—they certainly did not advance. Here is a hiatus of many years in our literary history, a period during which not even one faint ray shot from the flickerings of the lamp of science, within the wide extent of this now mighty empire.

The Church claims the first fruits, after the Indians were driven from the neighbourhood of the white settlements, and had fallen back upon the interior. Polemical divinity now engrossed every thought, and the abstruse disquisitions and disputes of sectarians, calling for books, for research, and for composition, rekindled the expiring flame. Continuing to trace the footsteps of literature, we next find them winding their way from the Church, to the Senate House, and the Bar;—in a word, their range had become much extended. Newspapers were established, pamphlets made their appearance, emulation was excited, and taste refined, by the introduction of the works of Dryden, Wicherly, Pope, Atterberry, Swift, Arbuthnot, Prior, Congreve, Addison, Bentley, Boyl, Steele, Rowe, Bolingbroke, and many others, who formed that constellation of genius which shone with such lustre, from the reign of William and Mary to that of George the Second. The letters of Junius reached us long afterwards—they form a distinct style in English *Belles Lettres*, but are mentioned here with less reference to that fact, than to the effect produced by them. He certainly must read those celebrated letters with little attention, and be grossly ignorant of the history of those days, who hesitates in allowing them an important share in producing that resistance to the mother country, which terminated in the emancipation of the colonies: they breathed the spirit of liberty into the souls of our forefathers, and with a breath of flame.

The wealth of the colonies, the long and bloody war which followed, and its termination in our emancipation from the yoke of Great Britain, however important and beneficial in a national point of view, had temporarily a baneful effect upon the literature, morals, and religion of the country. For from the year 1775 to the year 1783, our schools, our courts,

and our churches, may be said to have been shut up; and small as was the advancement we had made in the path of literature, that advancement was not only checked, but we were actually put back.

From this period we took our attitude in the world, as a separate and distinct nation, dependent on our own resources and exertions for our well-being and advancement. The disasters of war, at no time easily repaired, fell heavily on us. Our means were exhausted, our population thinned; an ill state of feeling remained in the country, and its morals were in the very worst condition. These were indeed difficulties, and of the most serious character; but they were to be encountered by veterans, by men accustomed to a frowning front, and familiar with opposition.

In looking through the annals of the world, we will scarcely find a more instructive lesson than that which is taught at this period of the history of the days of our fathers. It shows what energy may effect when virtue is its basis, and inflexible determination its support. Never were prospects more discouraging nor success more complete. A wise and just government was established—order restored—our dilapidated colleges were re-built—new ones erected and endowed, and we appeared at once among the nations of the earth, like an island bursting from the bosom of the deep. Nor are the sons of such fathers liable to reproach, for not following in their footsteps—they have continued the good work—there is not a country on earth where greater exertions are making for the extension of education than in the United States. Schools are daily increasing and spreading themselves like net-work over the land.

In those States where wealth and opinion happily combine in the advancement of literature, the attainments which have been made are as great as they are well deserved. Already have they silenced the invidious interrogatory from the other side of the Atlantic, "*Who ever reads an American book?*" and should it please the Almighty to preserve the Union, and save us from dissensions among ourselves, the next century will see much of the literary debt paid off which we owe the old world. Nothing, as it seems to me, can be wiser than the system which has been adopted by some of those States, if the information I have received can be relied upon. Every township, or other thickly settled part of

the country, has a primary school established in it; where reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, and the great principles of christianity are taught; several of these townships are conveniently grouped together for an academy, into which the pupils pass from the primary schools, and are there prepared for the freshman class in college. Was our only difficulty that of fixing upon a proper line of operations for North Carolina, I should certainly suggest this system to the Institute as worthy their attention. But, alas! the case is far otherwise with us; we have a dragon in our path to encounter, in the unfavourable state of public opinion, and till that is removed, it is useless to think of plans and systems of general education. Until our countrymen shall annex a more extensive meaning to the word *Education* than that which they at present attach to it, and by a juster estimate of its value, feel a much stronger interest in its acquisition, every effort we can make will only be rolling the stone of Sisyphus.

But however unpromising an aspect may be exhibited by a few of the States; as a Nation, our prospects are of the most flattering character, and the great cause of literature, of civilization, and the arts, is rising triumphant over every obstacle. Every year will add to its strength, every year will see the preceding year outstripped, in the number of the educated, and the extent of their acquisitions;—it is thus that a nation becomes literary. Each educated individual is an added pillar of support, for in proportion to the number of educated persons is there a call for books, and a consequent spread and enlargement of the sphere of knowledge.

Although literature in the United States may fairly be considered, at this day, as placed upon a firm and permanent basis, yet its progress is impeded by circumstances more extensively applicable to us, than I think to almost any other people. For, in a country like ours, where families are large, and fortunes small, many with difficulty go through a collegiate course, and when graduates are obliged hastily to look for present means of subsistence, without reference to taste or talent. Agriculture, however necessary or noble an avocation and science, is that which least fits us for pushing forward the higher faculties of the mind, or advancing in literary pursuits. There is a great difference between a literary man attending to agriculture for information, and an agriculturalist becoming a literary man; in truth, literature is here

seldom attended to, whatever may have been the first intentions of the individual, or however nature may have organized his mind for such pursuits. The cares of a family too early encountered,—a depressed mind,—associations in the humbler walks of life, and reading confined to the village newspaper, with an occasional dipping into *Bucchan's* or *Thomas's Family Practice*, when a child or a servant is sick, too often closes the career of one, who under happier circumstances, might have been an ornament to letters, and have added to the fame and the glory of his country.—View the Student retiring from college under more fortunate circumstances;—he is a Lawyer, a Physician:—yet his profession engrosses all;—he too, early surrounds himself with a family, (for such is the fashion of our country) and life often slips from under him, before he has even had time to turn his attention to any thing but the avocation of the day.

Yet let us not be discouraged. Time, the great corrector of all things, will be unto us, as he has been unto the other nations of the earth; for the scy he which has been put into his hand by the Poet and the Painter, is levelled at the errors of mankind, as well as at physical existence. The taste for show and expense, inseparable from civilization, will, contradictory as it may seem, work the most important result in the cause of literature. The difficulty of maintaining a family in a certain style, (for it is idle to think of the primitive simplicity of republics) will inevitably check the evil of imprudent matrimonial connexions, and arriving at wealth, or easy competency, too late for the cares of a family the attention of the individual will often, while living, be directed to literary pursuits; and his fortune, when dead, be applied to their advancement and support.

This is no vision of mine; it is a very common occurrence in Europe, and has been so for centuries; but is more particularly remarkable in England, where college after college has been erected, and millions bestowed in endowing them, from the source I have pointed to. In these institutions, as well as in the colleges of our own country, various systems have been adopted; for like every thing else, education has been, and ever must be, liable to the effect of a peculiar state of things, and the influence of *men in power at the time*, whose views and predilections give a tone and direction to it, and, consequently, to the rising generation. For it would be extreme-

ly difficult to get a great statesman or divine, (no matter how old he might be) to believe, that he would not live to enjoy the benefit of those principles which he was inculcating through the discipline and course of study of the colleges that were under his control. The cardinals, Ximenes, Alberoni, Wolsey, Richelieu, and Mazarine, are striking examples among a page full of names that might be adduced in support of this. Apart from the peculiarities of the institutions themselves, in their primary organization, so long as things are in a state of quietude, there is no particular propensity to the cultivation of any one faculty or science, above another. But as soon as any great design is on hand, or strong impression is made on the public mind, the science immediately applicable thereto, becomes the favorite, and every energy is employed in its cultivation. It is for this reason, that one age or period is more productive than another, of eminent characters in particular branches of science; for *ceteris paribus*, I am not disposed to believe, that there is any material variation in the quantum of talent in existence in any country;—it is *cultivation* which makes the difference we see. Thus does a beneficent Providence, in literature, as in every thing else, cause, under the guidance of consummate wisdom, the opinions, the tastes, the labours, and the pursuits of our age, to become mines of instruction, of wealth, and of blessing to the succeeding.

This reflection, at all times consolatory, is particularly so in an age remarkable, as is the present, for experiment and the freedom of opinion. That we are approaching a crisis in the literary, as well as political world, the result of which no man can foresee, is well known, and is looked to with anxiety. Education is but another name for our preparation for the business of life, and it is quite natural that there should be differences of opinion respecting it; but these should ever be discussed with calmness, and with a view to a wise result, rather than of victory in an argument;—it is a subject of too serious a character, to allow of petulancy. Is the discussion of that deeply interesting question “*Shall the dead or learned languages, longer be retained as a part of the education of youth?*” at all assisted by the affirmative advocates, when they found the opposition of their adversaries in ignorance, and an indisposition to encounter the labor which their acquisition demands? Or are the supporters of

the negative benefitted by delivering over their opponents to strutting pedantry, and a childish butterfly pursuit afterwards? Certainly not; and while the votaries of literature are anxiously looking forward to the issue of this momentous question, they can have little relish for the calling of names, and the details of personal altercation. The last thirty years, productive of so many important political events, are not less remarkable in literary history, for within that period more has been said, and a deeper impresion made on both sides of the Atlantic, unfavorable to the cultivation of the dead languages, than is to be met with, let us go back to what point we may.

Be it far from me to assume the province of umpire in these disputes among the learned:—I have not the honor to be numbered among them, and cannot, therefore, be even a partisan; yet, I am one of the guardians of a literary institution, and in that capacity, and as a simple individual, I may be allowed an opinion.

If, in the study of the Greek and Latin languages, we are to gather only a parcel of words, used by men who have been more than two thousand years in their graves—to know that *logos* means a *word*, and that *kai* means *and*; that *ubi* means *where*, and *quando* means *when*; I admit the pursuit is idle, and a waste of time. But if we are to consider their acquisition as a powerful assistant in refining taste, in the enlargement of thought, and as an inexhaustible source of the most happy and apposite illusions, in composition and in oratory; if, as a chain of connexion, as well with the dead, as with those who may live ten thousand years to come, when the language that we now speak may have fallen into barbarism; I must feel an interest in their preservation. It may be a vision, a dream—yet I have mused on sacred offices to be performed many, many ages hence: when the learned, from time to time, as our language declines, shall collect the classical remains of their countrymen, and translating them into the Greek or Latin (languages which have long ceased to know the influence of change) snatch them from oblivion, and hand them down to posterity. It will be an office, pious as that when children collect the bones of their fore-fathers, and raise the column and the altar to their memory.

Among the many plans and speculations which have presented themselves on the theatre of the literary world, I have

been most struck by that which would fix our language at a particular point. This is not a new thought, it is a revived one, and one in which authors are too much interested to give up all hope of success, although the execution of the scheme must, upon sober reflection, appear impossible. For who can examine this subject, and fail to perceive that living languages, like the opinions, manners and fashions of the day, are under the unceasing process of change. They keep pace with the enlargement of the intellectual faculties, and thus the increase of compound ideas, and the ever varying combinations of thought, are a perpetual draft on the coinage of words, for their expression and developement. Those who have written best, have certainly the most to fear, for the effect of time on all compositions in a living language, may be aptly compared to that of the atmosphere on burnished steel; corrosion soon commences, and gradually spreading over the whole superficies, blurs and destroys that smoothness, polish and brilliancy, once, perhaps, its principal excellence. Who now reads Chaucer or Spencer? They were the most refined and fascinating writers of the age in which they lived; they wrote in the purest English of their day, and yet have now to be *translated into English*, to be understood. No man had a clearer view of this appalling fact than the celebrated Dean of St. Patrick's, and few had more to fear from its effects; he sought a corrective with every energy of his nature, and there can be little doubt, would have succeeded in establishing a college for fixing the English language, had Queen Anne lived a few years longer. That this college would have done a great deal of good, is certain; for there never was one that did not; but that it would have totally failed of its purpose, is equally so. No living language can be restrained within metes and bounds, and all attempts of that character will be found as vain and impotent, as that of Xerxes, when he would have brought the sea to submission by scourging, and have thrown chains around its waves. Language, the great medium of interchange and communication between the members of the human family, has not failed of its due portion of consideration from the Most High; and for reasons much wiser than any we can assign, has been placed beyond the arbitrary control of man.



